

## Parshas Yisro – Should We Drink Lechaim to Life Before Kiddush? – Keith Goldstein

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From the words לקדשו השבת זכור את יום השבת contained in the עשרת הדברות the Gemara learns the mitzvah of kiddush. When a person makes kiddush to enable other people to be יוצא, before making the berachah on wine he says סברי or סברי רבותי being words meaning that those listening should concentrate and pay attention. There is a divergence in custom between Ashkenazim and Sephardim in that immediately after the words mentioned the Ashkenazim say the berachah on wine while the Sephardim first say לחיים. I would like to explore the reasons for each custom.

I will start with the Ashkenazim who, of course, comprise most of the members of our Shul, myself included. The reason why we say סברי derives from an halachah brought in the Gemara in Berachos explaining why the Mishnah says that if wine is being drunk during the course of the meal, but not before, even people who are eating together in one group have to make their own individual berachah rather than hearing together from one person. This contrasts with the situation where the berachah is being made on wine before the meal in which case it is preferable for them to hear the berachah from one person applying the principle that listening can be considered the same as uttering. The Gemara explains the reason for the difference in that in the middle of the meal people are engaged in eating and accordingly the food pipe is not empty. Rashi understands the reason given to mean that because they are engaged in eating they will not concentrate upon listening to the person saying the berachah. The Rambam and virtually all other Rishonim take the view that it means that there is concern that the people listening, even if they are concentrating, will look to answer אמן and might choke.

The view of the Rambam is brought in the Shulchan Aruch but the Rema, quoting a view brought in Tosfos, says, according to the explanation of Rashi, that if the person making the berachah were to direct the attention of the people to the fact that a berachah is going to be made, by saying סברי רבותי they will stop eating and concentrate to hear the berachah and will then be exempted from making one themselves. In order to ensure that the phrase סברי רבותי does not get overlooked in the above situation, the Rema says that it was instituted across the board, with perhaps one or two exceptions, every time one is including other people in a berachah on wine, but including in the case of kiddush or havdalah even though there is no question of anybody eating at that time.

The Sephardim follow the view of the Shulchan Aruch who, under no circumstances, will allow someone to be מוציא others with a berachah on wine in the middle of a meal and accordingly say סברי on other grounds. In the Midrash Tanchuma, written in the days of אביי ורבא it brings the law that when a person would be tried for a capital crime, the witnesses would stand outside the Beth Din at the time of the deliberation and if the accused was found innocent there would be a cry of לחיים but if he was found guilty he would be made drunk with wine to alleviate the mental and physical anguish of his execution. The midrash also brings that if the שליח צבור who is going to make kiddush or havdalah (which in those days meant to be מוציא people staying in shul premises) and was concerned that the cup might contain poison, presumably because it might have been left open and could be subject to snake infiltration, and it being the guests, not he who would be likely to drink it, he would turn to them and say סברי and they would say לחיים.

For the most part the rationale of the Sephardim in saying סברי is that people should concentrate on and associate with the positive aspects of wine which, of course, rejoices the heart of man as it says in Tehilim, rather than with the negative aspects of wine which are plentiful. The כף החיים brings down many negative aspects the antithesis to which will be לחיים namely the administering of wine to those about to be executed, as mentioned, comforting mourners, drunkenness and the consequences of it which we find with Noach, and the view that the Tree of Knowledge from which Adam ate or drank was a vine. The response is very much in line with what we answer in the prayers for rain and dew that they that they should be לחיים ולא למות. The actual words סברי מרנן represent, according to cabalistic sources, an exact balance between דין ורחמים. Wine represents דין and water represents רחמים and various combinations of names of Hashem are shown to have an equal balance between them within the aggregate numerical value of סברי מרנן. While the custom is not universal, it is a Sephardic custom prevalent certainly among Gibraltarians, as I have witnessed and I would expect among Moroccans also, that on Friday night, after saying whole of the chapter of ויכול water is poured into the cup so as to blend the characteristics of each, as mentioned above. Of course the opening of kiddush before then with ויכול constitutes testimony that Hashem created the world and testimony is given before a judge or judges which obviously would be דין.

The aspect of water sweetening the spiritual harshness of wine is brought by the Gaon of Vilna to explain the statement of our Rabbis that rain falling on Succos in the land of Israel is not a good sign being compared to a servant coming before his master with a pitcher of water to dilute his wine and, according to the general understanding, the master throwing the water in the face of the servant. The Gaon says that the true interpretation is that the master throws the pitcher on its face i.e. pouring out and rejecting the water. The days of Succos are meant to be days of rejoicing and רחמים to sweeten the days of judgement which have just passed with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and Hashem is showing that He does not wish to move on from those days of judgement by mitigation.

לעילוי נשמות אבי מורי ואמי מורתי זקני וזקנותי ע"ה